



Rep. Brian Thomas

Address
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7876
E-mail
thomas_br@leg.wa.gov
Committees
Finance, chair
Energy and Utilities
Legislative Hotline
1-800-562-6000

February 1998

Dear Friends,

The 1998 legislative session finds us continuing on our course for more efficient and accountable government. Many of the issues we expect to address are welcome challenges: what do we do with a healthy revenue surplus, how do we sustain our economic growth and quality of life, and how do we give our children the best opportunity to succeed in a very promising marketplace.

These are important issues, and there are others, all of which stand to test the limits of what we can accomplish in a short 60-day session beginning Jan. 12. This report is a summary of our priorities. I invite you to read through this and share any thoughts or questions you might have regarding legislation in the 1998 session. Your ideas are important to me. I appreciate the opportunity to serve as your state representative.

Best regards,

Brian Thomas
State Representative

► 5th District Activity Calender

5th District Day
Wednesday, February 18

Residents of the 5th District are invited to be our guests at the Capitol on Wednesday, February 18. Visitors will get a chance to tour the Capitol facilities, have a brown bag lunch with their local lawmakers, and watch their state government in action. For more information or to make reservations, please call (360) 786-7876.

Town Hall Meetings Saturday, February 18th

You are invited to a Town Hall meeting on Saturday, February 21. Rep. Brian Thomas, Rep. Phil Dyer and Sen. Dino Rossi will be on hand at the following times and locations to provide an update on the 1998 legislative session and give you an opportunity to ask questions and share ideas with your local lawmakers.

Hope to see you there.

Town Hall Meeting Schedule

10 a.m. - 11 a.m.
North Bend Library
115 E. 4th St.

1 p.m. - 2 p.m.
King County Police Station (Maple Valley)
22300 SE 231st

11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Mary Queen of Peace Church (Sammamish Plateau)
1121 228th Ave. SE

2:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Fairwood Library
17009 140th Ave. SE

For more information or for special arrangements for people with disabilities, please call (360) 786-7876.

1998 Mid-Session Report
5th Legislative District

Rep. Brian Thomas
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Washington State
Department of Printing

State surplus belongs to taxpayers

You may have read that the state’s general fund is currently expecting an \$861 million surplus. The surplus is a sign of a good economy and a strong economic policy. We’ve reduced taxes by \$1 billion over the last three years, we approved a budget that limits the growth in state spending to its lowest level in 26 years, and we’ve improved the state’s bond rating which means savings for the taxpayers on long-term interest payments. This is all good news brought about by good government.

While \$861 million sounds like a tremendous amount of money, it is important that we maintain our discipline in order to continue protecting taxpayers from excessive government growth. The “spend-it-if-you-got-it” approach is what led the state into a fiscal “crisis” in 1993. Things will be quite different this time around. The Republican majority feels strongly that this money belongs to the taxpayers and should be used in their best interest - not for special interests.

Tax cuts

There will be additional tax cuts in the 1998 session. We’ve always maintained that every dollar the government has was taken from someone else who worked for it. We believe the taxpayers should be allowed to keep as much of their own money as possible. We will be looking at additional reductions in the state property tax levy and a proposal to reduce the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax, which is the money you pay when you license a vehicle.

Responsible savings

It is important that we maintain a responsible reserve fund. Like households or businesses that try to keep some savings on hand for emergencies, the state should have a rainy day fund to protect taxpayers against an inevitable economic down turn. We refuse to go back to the days of budgeting by crisis. With a responsible level of savings we can avoid cutbacks in essential services, such as education, and suppress big government’s urge for spontaneous tax hikes at the first sign of economic trouble.

Sound investments

A portion of the surplus will also be used to invest in infrastructure. We are facing serious transportation needs in this state, and a long-term visionary transportation solution is needed to sustain our economy and our quality of life. The Republican legislative leaders have developed a plan that provides an additional \$2.4 billion for transportation over the next six years without the need for an 11-cent gas tax increase, which the governor has proposed. Our plan would provide the same level of funding as the governor’s plan, and we can do it without raising taxes.

We are also conducting performance audits of the transportation agencies to ensure that we are making good use of existing dollars. The resurfacing project on Interstate 405 and the construction of a new interchange near DuPont have become model examples of how the state can complete highway projects ahead of schedule and under budget.



Rep. Brian Thomas has introduced legislation this session that establishes a legal presumption in favor of the taxpayer and puts the burden of proof on government in all tax disputes.

Taxpayer Bill of Rights

I have introduced legislation that would have a significant impact on the way government treats taxpayers. House Bill 2324 establishes a legal presumption in favor of the taxpayer and places the burden of proof with the government in all tax disputes.

Under current law, the government always enjoys the home field advantage. If the government says a tax is owed and the individual taxpayer says it's not, the burden of proof has always been on the taxpayer. I think that's backwards. The obligation should be on the government to prove that a tax liability exists and that the imposition of that tax is within its authority.

My bill states that any property, income, asset or service is considered to be not subject to taxation unless there is a law that clearly and expressly imposes such a tax. If there is any doubt regarding the exact meaning of the law, then it would be construed in favor of the person disputing the tax obligation and against the government.

The number of tax disputes that will result from this legislation is debatable. But if this bill is passed into law, state and local government leaders would be continually challenged to consider the reaches of their taxing authority. If the number of tax disputes were to rise significantly, it would make me wonder about how heavy handed our government has become when exercising its taxing authority over its citizens.

Creating better schools “Kids First”

We have a unique opportunity to make measurable progress in our quest for better schools in Washington. We will be discussing legislation this session to increase accountability, improve reading skills, and adopt teaching methods that best help students learn and achieve success.

Accountability

If we expect more in education, we will get more. The Legislature will be working to pass a bill this session that would require schools to set goals and show measurable progress toward improving student performance in key areas of learning.

Reading initiatives

We are glad to see that the governor has embraced the Legislature’s focus on reading, aimed at teaching every student to read by the third grade. We feel strongly that reading is the key to learning in all subject areas, and greater emphasis on reading performance will go a long way toward improving academic performance in our schools.

Charter schools

We will also be striving for agreement on a bill that will create innovation in education and provide more choices for Washington families. Charter schools are independent public schools that are able to incorporate unique methods of learning while being subject to the same academic and safety standards as other public schools.

Better results a matter of time

If we are serious about improving education, we must increase the quality learning time that we offer students. I have introduced legislation (HB 2475) this session that will increase the number of days in a school year from 180 to 190. These additional days will provide time in the classroom, not curriculum planning or inservice days. A longer school year is consistent with other countries that place emphasis on academic achievement with greater success.